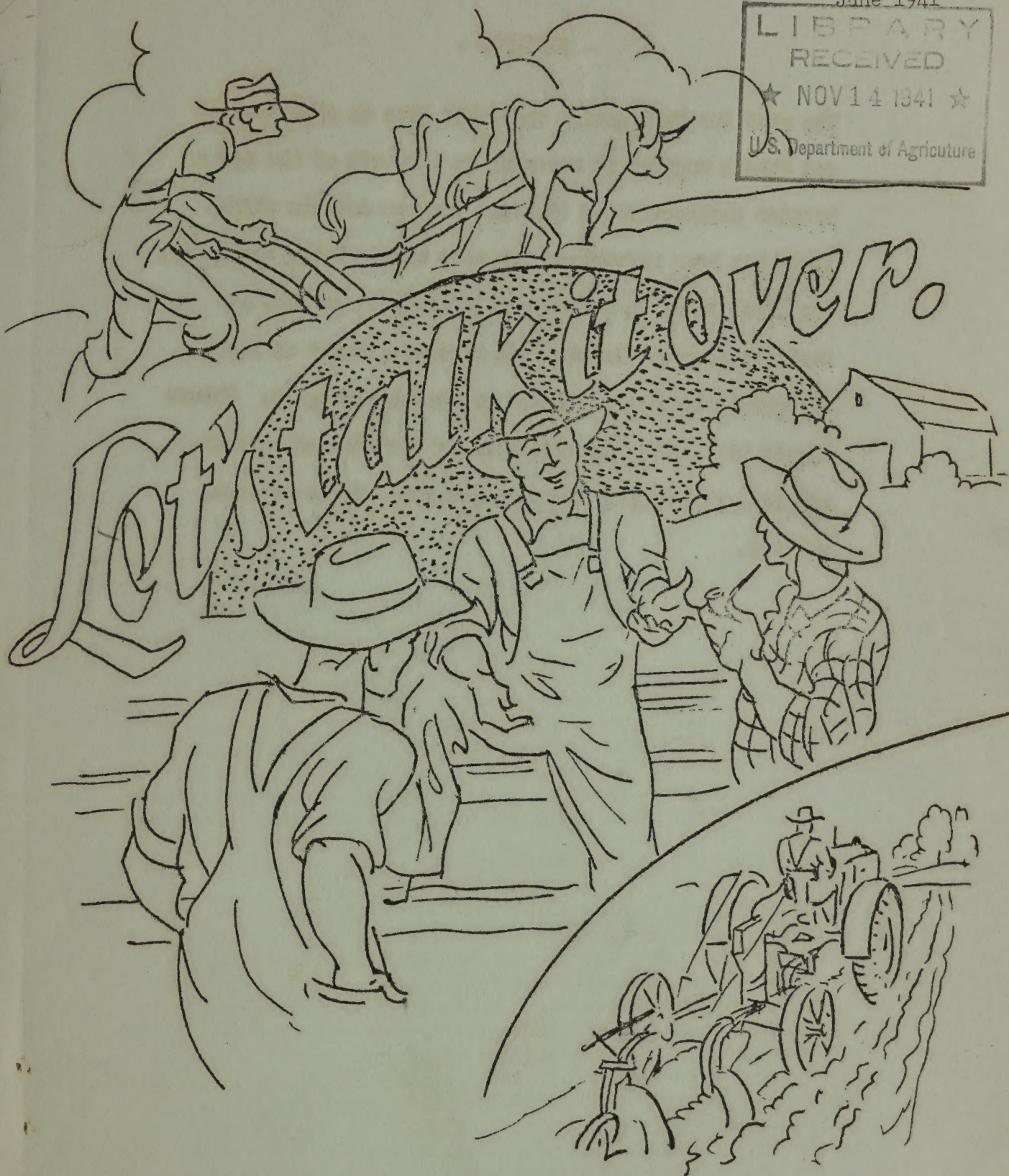


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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND -----No. 1

June 1941

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East Central Division  
U.S. Agricultural Adjustment Administration  
United States Department of Agriculture  
Washington, D. C.



- FOREWORD -

The need for information that will give to committeemen and others engaged in carrying on the work of the AAA a broader perspective of the farm program and its objectives has been recognized for some time. This, therefore, the first issue in a "Let's Talk It Over" series, is designed to give, in brief, a clearer picture of the background leading up to the present AAA program. Future issues will cover the operation of the AAA and current problems relating to the farm program and the national welfare.



# The AAA -- Its Background

## PART I

### 1. Agriculture -- The Land -- Conservation

Of all resources at man's disposal, the soil is one of his most vital natural gifts. This rim of life-giving matter, averaging around 5 to 7 inches in depth, has furnished the means of subsistence for the human race down through the centuries. During this time, however, wind and rain have been tugging at the earth's surface, shuffling and shifting its particles from place to place. Farming no doubt had been going on for centuries before erosion became a recognizable human problem. The pressure of increased population, forcing steep slopes into cultivation, caused man to see the ruinous effect of wind and rain on the soil. This led the more civilized people to begin steps to protect their land from the wasteful processes of erosion.

History shows need for conservation. -- Centuries before the birth of Christ soil conservation was a well-established principle. The farsighted peoples of the Near East and North Africa built benchlike terraces of stone or earth on hillsides to stop the ravages of erosion. Probably the world's most spectacular demonstration of the need for conservation is found in China where huge gullies -- often 200 feet deep -- were gnawed into the earth after virgin forests had been chopped down to make way for cultivation. In an effort to combat the ceaseless march of erosion, land improvement and conservation programs have been launched, in comparatively recent years, in Switzerland, Denmark, Hungary, Germany, Italy, and the United States. In colonial America, settlement was confined fairly closely to a narrow strip along the Atlantic seaboard for nearly 200 years after Jamestown and Plymouth were colonized, with the result that the land which was cleared and planted to corn, cotton, tobacco, and rice had suffered so severely from erosion and overcropping by the time of Washington and Jefferson that they became aroused and took steps to halt the inroads that had been made upon the soil resources. The problem of erosion is still with us to the extent that more than half the land in the United States is affected in some degree -- erosion is costing farmers around 400 million dollars annually in the loss of plant foods and crop yields.

### 2. Early Agriculture in United States.

The colonists who first came to North America grew their crops in the clearings they found, but later began to push back the forest, using the Indian method of girdling and burning trees. Almost from the beginning of colonization there were laws, passed either by England or the Colonies, controlling marketing and production. Numerous restrictions on the production of tobacco were put into effect to prevent glutting the market and to insure the growing of food crops. Other control measures applied to tobacco were price-fixing agreements, official grading, and destruction of surpluses. Bounties were paid for growing indigo, hemp, flax, and naval stores products. Efforts also were made to stimulate the production of silk, sugar, spices, wine, and subtropical fruits. Livestock was scarce due to the fact that all animals had to be imported. Most of the colonial trade was overseas but a sizeable amount developed between the colonies. New England became a commercial and shipping center, the middle Colonies became a fur-trading and grain-exporting region, while the South contributed largely to overseas trade, tobacco being the chief export product.



Bountiful land supply. -- After the colonists had lived on the Atlantic seaboard for almost 200 years and the land had been badly depleted by overcropping and erosion, they began to migrate westward. The period 1790 - 1850 was marked by one of the greatest migrations in the history of the world. From the growing industrial center of the Northeast, from the worn-out, eroded farms in the old South, and from the crowded centers of Europe, men pushed westward across the United States in search of new land and new opportunities. The virgin territories beyond the Alleghenies, the free land beyond the Mississippi River to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, and finally California and the Pacific Northwest beckoned the pioneers onward.

Waste of soil. -- Seldom in the history of the world has there ever been such widespread waste of soil as accompanied and followed this pioneer westward movement. The forests were cut, prairie grasses were plowed, land was put to cultivation and when it wore out or became too badly eroded to struggle with, the pioneer abandoned it and moved on to new land. In the urge to settle and develop the country as rapidly as possible, no thought was given to the wasting of the soil. Steep hillsides were laid open to erosion by the plow, cattle and sheep overburdened the range and pasture, and the plow uprooted virgin grasslands, exposing them to wind and water erosion. Now the yawning gullies of the Piedmont region and other hill sections, and the awful spectacle of duststorms scouring the surface of the Great Plains, are grim reminders of the soil waste that was started by our pioneer forefathers and continued by their posterity.

### 3. Relation of Early Industry and Agriculture in United States.

Rural and urban antagonisms had their roots in the colonial periods in the conflicts between the politically powerful commercial interests of the cities and the self-sufficient farmers of the hinterland. Up until the Civil War, agricultural production was dominant. After that, agriculture saw industrial enterprise forge ahead into the leading role. The farming interests, in the South especially, began to wage a losing fight against the protective tariff which increased the cost of many of the manufactured goods they had to buy. As a result of the Civil War there was a great expansion of industry in the North. In the South the sharecropping system tended to grow up in place of the old plantation slave system. By 1889, the income derived from manufacturing for the first time was greater than from agriculture. Agricultural and industrial incomes seesawed for a number of years, but income from manufacturing gained unquestioned leadership by 1910 and has exceeded agricultural income every year since that time. The United States came to rank first among industrial countries. Agriculture expanded, too, but was never able to reap benefits comparable to those of business because farmers could not combine to keep prices up by controlling output to the extent that industrialists could.

Machine age. -- From the use of oxen and horses for power, crude wooden plows, sickles for grain and hay-cutting, threshing with flails, the history of American agriculture turned into what is known as the machine age with the advent of the 1800's. The mechanical reaper, the steel plow, the grain drill, the corn drill, and the threshing machine were all being used by farmers before the Civil War. Between 1860 and 1910 there was a general displacement of man labor by horse labor, and after 1910 another great period began, marked by the rapid substitution of mechanical power for horses.



The coming of the machine age, with its extension of transportation and communication facilities, the increasing dependence of the farmer on the urban market, and the growth of both formal and informal educational institutions, tended to reduce the difference between rural and urban life.

Department of Agriculture established. -- After almost a hundred years of preliminary steps toward the establishment of a full-fledged agricultural agency in the government, the Department of Agriculture was set up in 1862, but did not receive Cabinet status until 1889.

Prior to the establishment of an independent Agriculture Department, there was a tentative proposal in 1776 for Congress to set up a standing committee to assist agricultural societies; two decades later Washington proposed a Board of Agriculture, and a similar proposal was made in 1817; in 1836 Henry Elsworth, Commissioner of Patents, undertook to distribute to farmers seeds that had been sent back by consuls and naval officers from abroad; an Agriculture Division was inaugurated in the Patent Office and regular agriculture appropriations were made after 1847; and in 1855 a chemist, a botanist, and an entomologist were employed. With the establishment of an independent department in 1862 the foundation was laid for a broad policy of research and education. Also, in 1862, the Morrill Act authorized the setting up of land-grant colleges, and in 1887 the Hatch Act provided for a national system of State agricultural experiment stations.

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## PART II

### 1. World War Repercussions

The two decades immediately preceding World War I were favorable years in our agricultural history. It was during this period that land values moved steadily upward, commodity prices were going up slowly, many farmers began to improve their physical plants, and the men who tilled the soil were obtaining a new voice in the Nation's affairs. When the war came, agriculture was forced into an unnatural expansion in response to the abnormal demands of a rapidly growing nation and a prosperous world market. Farmers had 3 years of high price and good income during the war, but neither prices nor profits were high compared with those of industry. The war, when it was over, left agriculture "high and dry" with many problems of adjustment that farmers are still struggling to solve.

End of land frontier. -- The war boom period, with its expanded production, marked the end of the land frontier. High prices and a seemingly limitless demand for farm products caused a mad scramble for more land. Thus the land frontier vanished. Furthermore, this period of all-out production was characterized by untold waste of soil through bad land use and erosion.

United States becomes creditor nation. -- The sudden shift of this country from a debtor to a creditor nation within a few brief war months brought about changes in our economic framework that were drastic and far-reaching. Instead of sending to Europe goods to be applied onto our debts, we suddenly began operating on a gigantic production basis that soon brought about stupendous entries on the credit side of our ledger. When we stopped granting credits to Europe after the war, foreign buying fell off, and prices crashed. Europe could not pay us in goods because of a high tariff policy. Then European countries went nationalistic and further throttled trade. Also, the war had stimulated production in other agricultural countries, including Canada, Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, and other Southern Hemisphere countries, some of them having cheaper land and labor than the United States.

### 2. Depression

The curtailment of foreign markets and diminishing domestic buying power, coupled with the inability of agriculture to make a drastic reduction in production after the sharp shrinkage in exports, caused surpluses to pile up. Farmers had used credit freely, buying more land and equipment. They had set aside little reserve to offset a decline in commodity prices. They did not know how to use production control to match falling demands. Old debts had to be paid with production which brought sharply lower prices.

Farm Board. -- Agricultural prices were the first to break in 1920. In an effort to parallel the production and marketing mechanisms of other industries, the Federal Farm Board was set up in 1929 under the Agricultural Marketing Act. The Farm Board attempted to stabilize prices by storing surplus wheat and cotton and withholding them from the market. These operations resulted in heavy losses. It was soon apparent that some form of production control would be necessary if agricultural supplies were to be held in line with actual market demands. When the depression struck with full force, the income and capital



value of farmers tumbled, banks closed, and economic chaos prevailed.

### 3. The AAA is created

It was quickly recognized that additional farm legislation was imperative, and various proposals were made which culminated in the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933. Under the AAA program millions of farmers entered into contract to reduce acreage in specified surplus crops in return for benefit payments, financed chiefly by processing taxes on the commodities concerned. In order to assure the success of the cotton and tobacco adjustment programs, producers of these crops demanded a penalty tax to prevent noncooperating producers from cashing in on the adjustments the cooperators were making. These demands led to the passage of the Bankhead Control Act for cotton and the Kerr-Smith Tobacco Control Act.

Parity prices. -- Parity prices for agricultural products was the primary aim of the emergency program instituted in 1933. However, the real goal of agricultural recovery was the restoration of farm income to a point at which it would represent a fairer share of the national income and improvement in living standards for the farm population, which in turn would benefit the nation as a whole.

Marketing Agreements. -- Under the AAA, marketing plans, of a type utilized by cooperative groups long before the passage of the Adjustment Act, were developed. The principal method of improving conditions of producers of non-basic commodities was by means of marketing agreements and licenses. Licenses and orders under the act provided a means for making marketing agreement programs effective on minor groups not signatory to the agreement. Marketing agreements were used by producers of dairy products, fruits, vegetables, naval stores, tobacco, wheat, peanuts, and rice. Milk agreements provided a marketing plan to establish uniform producer prices and at the same time to maintain ample supplies. For general crops the principal method was to regulate the flow of supplies to market more nearly in line with consumer needs.

Court decision. -- The adjustment program was interrupted by the Supreme Court decision in the Hoosac-Mills case, in January 1936, which held that the production control provisions of the Agricultural Adjustment Act were unconstitutional on the ground that it was a means of regulating and controlling production, whereas this power resided in the States and not in Congress. The processing tax was also declared void because it was an inseparable part of the plan for effecting production control.

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### PART III

#### 1. Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act (1936)

The Supreme Court's decision in the Hoosac-Mills case was a setback to the farmer's effort to obtain parity prices. The 1936 act had as its main objective the placing of greater emphasis upon soil conservation and improved farm-management practices. Under the conservation act of 1936 voluntary cooperation and compliance with the program replaced the contracts under the original adjustment program; conditional payments replaced benefit payments; and direct appropriations replaced processing taxes. Although it had obvious merits as an aid to better use of land, the act of 1936 failed to meet the needs of farmers for some form of protection against surpluses.

#### 2. Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938

The failure of the 1936 act to provide a sufficient measure of control led to the enactment of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938. This well-rounded legislation, embodying much of the best in earlier legislative efforts, provided for: (1) Soil conservation, good farm management, and balanced output; (2) loans, marketing quotas, and parity payments; (3) marketing agreements; (4) the diversion of surplus production into domestic and foreign channels, and the development of new uses for agricultural products; and (5) crop insurance.

The 1938 act was attacked in the courts by tobacco growers in the case of Mulford Smith, on the ground that the act was unconstitutional. It is significant to point out that while certain provisions of the old Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 were declared unconstitutional in 1936 mainly because they attempted to regulate the production of agricultural commodities, the Supreme Court in the case of Mulford Smith, on April 17, 1939, upheld the marketing quota provisions of the 1938 act as a valid regulation of marketings.

Soil conservation. -- Maintenance of soil resources is a basic objective of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938, as a means of bringing enduring benefits to agriculture and the Nation. The 1938 act provides for payments to compensate cooperating farmers for planting within acreage allotments and for taking steps to check erosion and maintain the soil's fertility.

Loans. -- Loans are provided under the farm act to put a floor under the price of corn, wheat, cotton, tobacco, and rice. The effect of the loan is to hold surplus supplies off the market until they are needed. The holding of bumper crops in storage against future lean years is the basis for the Ever-Normal Granary. The grains stored in recent years are furnishing the substance for the food-for-defense program. Previously the Secretary had definite authority to fix a loan, at his discretion, up to 75 percent of parity on the five basic commodities. Recent legislation provided mandatory loans on these crops for 1941 at 85 percent of parity.

Marketing quotas. -- Marketing quotas may be used to buttress the price-supporting influence of the loans. Their effect is to limit the sale of a commodity during a marketing year when supplies are at excessive levels. Each farm



is given a quota and penalties are prescribed for marketings in excess of the quota. However, quotas are not in effect unless approved by two-thirds of the producers of the commodity who vote in a referendum.

Parity payments. -- Since the result of the loans and quotas may be to stabilize farm prices at levels still too low in the light of the goal of parity prices, the Secretary is authorized to make payments, insofar as funds are available, to producers of the five basic commodities so that these payments plus the returns from the proceeds of their crops will bring a return approximately equal to parity.

Crop insurance. -- The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 provided for the setting up of the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation in the Department of Agriculture. The Corporation has a capital stock of 100 million dollars and is empowered to write insurance against loss in wheat yields. The first insurance applied to the crop harvested in 1939. Farmers may pay their premium in cash or in kind and insure their harvest for either 50 or 75 percent coverage against all unavoidable losses. The operation of the crop insurance program ties in closely with the AAA. All local administrative work relating to the crop insurance program is handled by AAA committeemen. Insurance programs for other crops are also being considered.

Commodity Credit Corporation. -- The Commodity Credit Corporation was formed in 1933 by Executive Order under the authority of the National Industrial Recovery Act, and was incorporated as an agency of the United States Government. Under the President's Reorganization Order in 1939, the Corporation became a part of the Department of Agriculture. The CCC has an authorized and paid-in capital of 100 million dollars. In 1940 Congress increased the borrowing power of the Corporation on the credit of the United States Government to 1,400 million dollars. The CCC has made loans on butter, corn, cotton, dates, figs, hops, mohair, peanuts, pecans, prunes, raisins, rye, tobacco, turpentine, resin, wheat, and wool. The chief functions of the Corporation are to protect the farm price of agricultural products, and assure an adequate reserve supply of farm products. The arrangements under which CCC loans are utilized to provide an adequate market at reasonable prices in years of high production and an adequate supply at reasonable prices in years of low production are a part of the Ever-Normal Granary program. The Commodity Credit and AAA programs synchronize to the extent that AAA committeemen handle all field administrative work in connection with loans on wheat and corn and a number of other commodities.

Surplus Marketing Administration. -- The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 contained important provisions designed to widen the market for farm products. Foremost were provisions which continued the Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation and provided for the establishment of four regional laboratories to conduct research into and develop new uses and outlets for farm products. The original Agricultural Adjustment Act authorized the Secretary to make use of available funds for the disposal of surplus agricultural products, and section 32 of the amending acts provided that 30 percent of the receipts from import duties be segregated for use in surplus-removal operations. Operations designed to increase domestic use of farm products by low-income consumers were carried out first by the AAA in conjunction with the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation, and from 1935 to 1940 were carried out by the Federal Surplus Commodities



Corporation. On June 30, 1940, the Surplus Marketing Administration was set up, under Reorganization Plan No. 3, to take over the administrative functions and responsibilities of the FSCC and the Division of Marketing and Marketing Agreements.

More than 3 billion pounds of surplus farm products were bought under direct purchase programs during the 1940 fiscal year at a total cost slightly in excess of \$117,700,000. The commodities were purchased for distribution by State welfare agencies to families receiving public aid and for use in the school lunch program throughout the country. Free lunches were served to more than three million children in the peak month of the 1940 fiscal year. It was estimated that 6 million children would be able to receive free lunches under the expanded 1941 fiscal year program.

Food Stamp Plan. -- The objectives of the food stamp plan, which was started in May 1939, are to raise farmers' income by increasing the effective demand for their products, to use food surpluses so as to improve the diets of undernourished families in this country, and to accomplish this through the use of regular trade channels in a manner that will contribute toward improved business conditions. In most areas where the plan is in effect, needy persons may buy voluntarily a minimum of one dollar's worth of orange-colored stamps a week for each member of the family. These stamps are good for any food in co-operating stores in the area where the food stamp plan is in operation. Those buying the orange-colored stamps receive in most instances half again as many blue-colored stamps free. Blue stamps are good at the local store only for foods officially listed as surplus.

Cotton Stamp Plan. -- A cotton stamp plan, following the same general operating principles as the food stamp plan, and designed to encourage an increase in the domestic consumption of cotton, was started in May 1940 in Memphis and the rest of Shelby County, Tennessee. By June 1941, the operation of the cotton stamp plan had been expanded to include 27 areas scattered throughout the United States.

Supplementary Cotton Program. -- A supplementary cotton program, supplementing the existing AAA farm program, was started recently by the United States Department of Agriculture. This program offers the cotton farmer a chance to make a further voluntary reduction in his cotton acreage in 1941. For planting below the farm's 1941 allotment or 1940 measured acreage, whichever is smaller, the cotton farmer will receive cotton order stamps, which he can use to buy cotton goods in his local store. He will earn stamps at the rate of 10 cents a pound on the normal cotton yield of the acreage reduced. The maximum payment for a farmer is \$25 a farm, except that an operator with two or more tenants or sharecroppers, or a farmer interested in more than one cotton farm, can earn a maximum of \$50 in stamps. It is estimated that this program, for which \$25,000,000 has already been made available, will bring about a decrease in production of perhaps one million bales this year. At the same time, families on cotton farms will benefit from an increased supply of clothes and other cotton goods.



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## PART IV

### 1. The Department of Agriculture

The main purpose of the Department of Agriculture is to help the farmer solve his problems of production, marketing, farm organization, land tenure, and land utilization. Also, the Department helps farmers to raise their income, which in turn helps city people, since urban incomes go up and down with farm incomes. In addition to research and economic services, the Department also fulfills an important role through the administration of regulatory law. This function was started in 1884 when the Bureau of Animal Industry was created to help stamp out diseases of livestock. The Department now administers something like 50 regulatory statutes.

Units in the Department. -- Major departmental units, each supervised by an officer who reports directly to the Secretary, are: Agricultural Adjustment Administration, Bureau of Agricultural Chemistry and Engineering, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Marketing Service, Bureau of Animal Industry, Office of Budget and Finance, Office of Civilian Conservation Corps Activities, Commodity Credit Corporation, Commodity Exchange Administration, Bureau of Dairy Industry, Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, Office of Experiment Stations, Extension Service, Farm Credit Administration, Farm Security Administration, Federal Crop Insurance Corporation, Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations, Forest Service, Bureau of Home Economics, Office of Information, Office of Land Use Coordination, Library, Surplus Marketing Administration, Office of Personnel, Office of Plant and Operations, Bureau of Plant Industry, Rural Electrification Administration, Soil Conservation Service, and Office of the Solicitor.

### 2. History of the Department

The Department of Agriculture was established in 1862, but was not raised to Cabinet rank until 1889. In the same year that the Department was established, the Land-Grant College Act was passed. In the first year of its existence, the Department established a Division of Chemistry, and in the second year the Division of Entomology. The Bureau of Animal Industry was created in 1884, and in 1887 the Hatch Act provided for establishment of Agricultural Experiment Stations.

By 1890 good free or cheap land was no longer available. This means that the future needs for production would have to be met mainly out of the growth of science. Consequently, the Department's duties and responsibilities increased rapidly. To meet this new responsibility, old units of the Department were merged and new units were set up to carry on the research, service activities, and regulatory-law administration. The Meat Inspection Act of 1890 was followed by numerous regulatory laws, including the Packers and Stockyards Act of 1912. The Smith-Lever Act of 1914 provided for the establishment of cooperative extension work in agriculture and home economics. Subsequent legislation provided an increase in extension funds. The increased farm production during the World War period indicated the need for better crop and market information, which led to the establishment of an Office of Markets and Rural Organization. This later developed into the Bureau of Markets and Crop Estimates, and eventually into the



Bureau of Agricultural Economics. Land utilization research followed, and forestry became an important function of the Department.

The depression that followed the crisis of 1929 led to the formation of new land and agricultural policies for the United States. Congress directed the Department to develop many new agencies and to expand and give new duties to some of the older ones. The assignment of new duties to the Department created new administrative problems and required closer cooperation of research, administration, and action. The establishment of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration in 1933 marked the inauguration of the largest of the action programs. Some of the problems attacked by the AAA and subsequent action agencies included crop adjustment, soil conservation, marketing, surplus removal, and rural rehabilitation. The newer action agencies attempted to synchronize these functions with the older features of the Department's work. From 1933 to 1938 the Department continued to make certain administrative changes designed to facilitate cooperation with farmers and with State and local agencies. However, these changes did not entirely fulfill the exacting requirements of the changing situation. Consequently, in 1938 the Secretary announced some further Departmental changes and reorganization, designed to expedite closer cooperation between Federal and State agencies. The new set-up emphasized centralized basic planning, farmer participation in forming and executing programs, and the grouping of related tasks within the Department so as to expedite service to the public.

### 3. AAA Committees

The operation of the AAA farm program centers around the county agricultural conservation association. This is the local administrative unit of the AAA. All farmers who cooperate in the AAA program are members of their county association. The members carry on the business of their association through elected committees, one for each community and one for the county. There is a county committee in each of the 3,022 agricultural counties in the United States, and there are some 24,000 community committees. The total number of county and community committeemen, including alternates, is more than 135,000.

Through farmer administration, the AAA supplies a channel through which the demands, experience, and the knowledge of farmers have flowed to shape the program and to make it constantly more effective and more democratic.

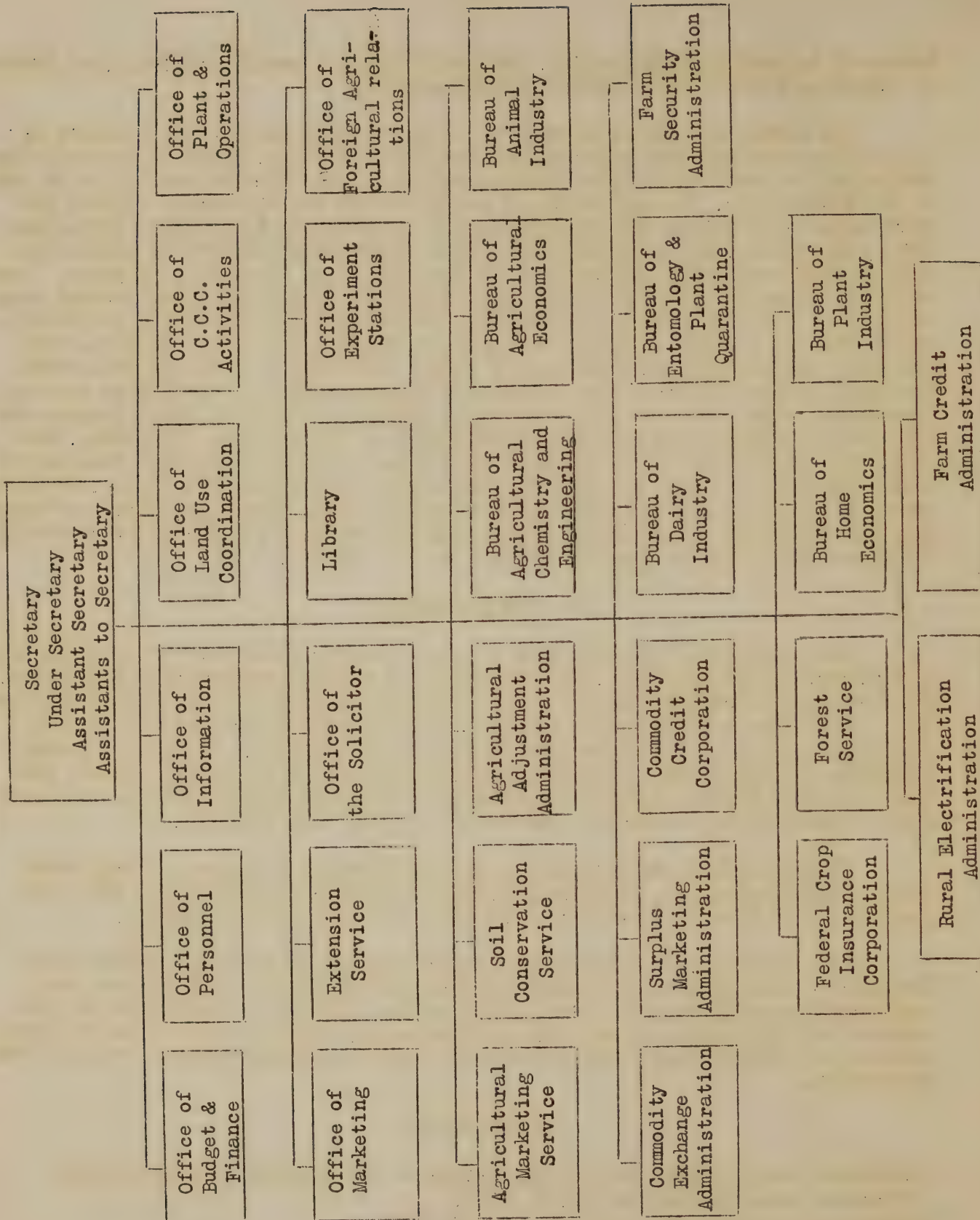
The training, the experience, and development of AAA committeemen over the last 8 years represent a wealth of practical knowledge, information, and understanding of farm and national problems that will prove invaluable to agriculture and the Nation in this time of emergency. The interests of our national defense and civilian needs will be served better for having today a trained farm leadership.

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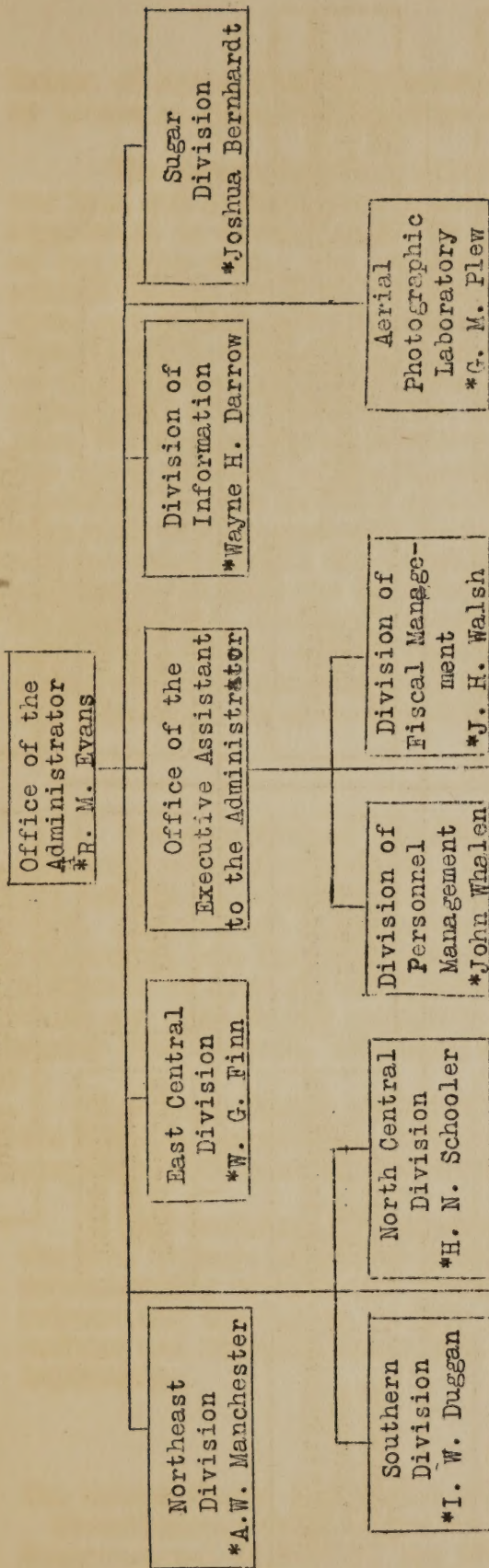


# UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



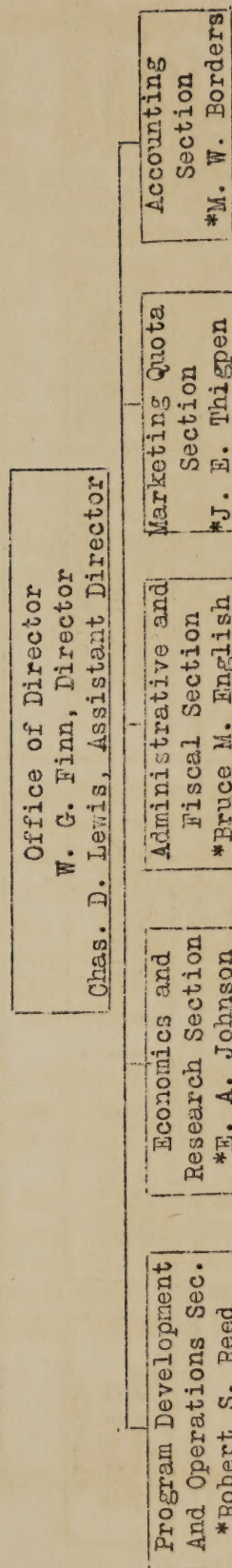


# AGRICULTURAL ADJUSTMENT ADMINISTRATION



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## EAST CENTRAL DIVISION



\*Officer in Charge



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